



TOTALLY AUTHENTIC

**SANCTUARY FIRST
CONNECT BIBLE STUDY**

JUNE 2025

WELCOME TO CONNECT!

A Connect Bible Study is a small group who meet regularly to explore faith and life, growing in the things of God together as we go. Anyone can host one using these materials and contact us for support and guidance. Online or in-person, our heart is that they offer a relaxed space for faith, friendship and fun.

We hope the resources and discussion points encourage, inspire, and invigorate you on your walk with God.

It might be the conversation follows the discussion as laid out or heads in a different direction, both are wonderful and we hope the outline we offer here is flexible and supportive to engage with the Bible and our faith in fresh and vibrant ways as we make our way in the world as 21st century disciples exploring the wonders of life with Jesus!

WHAT IS INVOLVED?

Each week begins with an introduction and a 'seed to sow' conversation starter. These are open-ended prompts to inspire creative responses to the themes. Perhaps they will inspire you to write a song or a poem, or to paint, draw, move or explore! (We would love to hear how you get on with this!) We imagine the material for each week would work for 90 minute sessions but feel free to adapt to your group!

There are more songs, videos, podcasts and blogs linked to this theme on our **website** and **App**, have fun exploring it all!

TOTALLY AUTHENTIC

You have got nothing to prove and everything to gain! You are totally authentic!

You do not have to prove yourself to God. You are marked already with the maker's seal, the Holy Spirit already walks with you, knows your heart, knows you at a cellular and a soul level. You are a 100% original, 100% the genuine article. We are living through times that are a bit of a double edged sword. Unstable, unpredictable and unprecedented... and yet constantly updating with new information, analysis and insights. We know more than ever what we don't know!

There's a lot of noise and it's easy to lose ourselves in it, to forget who we are, to feel flimsy and insubstantial in the face of current events and global crises. In arts and culture and across society there is a hunger for authenticity, for something genuine to cling to in the face of news overload, sensationalism, and disinformation. It can be hard not to feel like just another cog in a wheel, or another line of code in an algorithm — pushed around by business interests, big tech, media personalities and politicians. Indeed sometimes we literally find ourselves having to prove our humanity in the face of machines wanting to ensure that we are not frauds.

We are increasingly drawn to the authentic and genuine, both within ourselves and in the world. To prove that we're still here, that we still matter, that we have a stake in the planet. That we're not just another voter, or consumer, or user, or data point.

But God already knows you're authentic. That you're unique.

Because God made you that way.

How can we let this truth ground us in these uncertain times? As we rediscover in Ephesians 1: 3-14, we already belong, we are already accepted, we are already being gathered in. We already have our humanity as a gift from God! The approval, esteem, recognition, personhood, we strive for is something we can already find in Christ. How

does it change our lives when we begin with the principle that there is already a place where we belong, where we are understood, where we are loved, where we matter? How can this help us to shape authentic communities of love and respect where others can discover that they belong, that we are understood, that they are loved?

WEEKLY OVERVIEW

- **The longing that never goes away**
- **The revolution will be subtitled**
- **What is integrity anyway?**
- **Always more questions**
- **A genuine person**

Thanks to James Cathcart and Albert Bogle for developing this material.

PRAYER

LET US PRAY

Dear God of welcome
Thank you that you love us completely
Thank you that you sent this message to us in
so many ways
Help us to spend our time on earth
welcoming others
and welcoming ourselves to relax into a
feeling of belonging.
Amen

Lily Cathcart

REFLECTION

COSMIC CREATOR AND SAVIOUR

Father, Son and Holy Spirit
God
Of Thought
Of Word
Of Action
What a magnificent universe You have created
What an unimaginable gesture of Love
To become one of us
To travel from a triune God dimension
Breaking into time
Re-formed as a man
unrecognised
Rejected
To reform mankind into your God image
You are truly our cosmic Saviour
We stand in awe
For we cannot grasp
What in reality
You have given us
So we sing a hallelujah

Albert Bogle

WEEK 1: THE LONGING THAT NEVER GOES AWAY

INTRODUCTION:

It is human nature to seek guidance and direction — it's an essential survival trait from birth and as we grow older there are no shortage of people and things we can turn to. (For some that is all that 'God' is, an abstract concept that we can point all that longing towards. A symptom of human development, a quirk of psychology, nothing more.) We can fill this longing with all sorts of things, but it never goes away. This makes us vulnerable to those who would manipulate us, and yet often the things that we elevate above all else are good things — great things even! Family, artistry, altruism, activism, scientific endeavour. These are all wonderful things — that God celebrates in us — but whenever we worship some such thing to the exclusion of all else, the cracks will start to show. Both good and bad motivations can easily become idols — giving us standards of perfection we can't hope to live up to. But in the person of Christ is a selfless love that is big enough to take our longing and go on loving us back.

SEEDS TO SOW:

What does the word 'idol' make you think of? What do you associate with it?

READ PSALM 97: 1-7

What images do we serve?

There are many images that are worshiped in our society. There's the images of success and achievement. People worship the picture of the perfect family, or rural domestic bliss, or the self-made business guru. Then there's the images of technological innovation, the noble cause, the political ideal — images we worship and try to emulate.

Let's discuss how our feelings towards good things (like family, a worthy cause, the respect of our peers) can become distorted and warped when we start to worship an idealised image of them above all else.

READ EXODUS 20: 3-6 AND PSALM 115: 4-8

Carving Images 2.0

The psalmist slams idols with their silent, frozen expressions. But nowadays the technology we idolise has an uncanny ability to see and hear us, speak to us even...

While we still have chisels and hammers we have expanded the toolbox for carving idols. We use contemporary tools like AI, social media, digital voice assistants, virtual reality, next day delivery, drones, facial recognition, the list goes on — to carve objects of worship and adoration that supplant God in our worship as they promise to meet all our needs. Discuss how we can utilise the potential of technology while being cautious of the peril of falling into the familiar trap of creating our own gods.

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 10: 23-33

Yes/No, Both/And, Partake/Abstain

Paul makes a nuanced point here about how our behaviour affects others. This new community of believers is not going to have the same strict dietary rules but Paul's point is that doesn't mean they can merrily scoff whatever they want. If they eat food that someone says they've sacrificed to an idol that could be seen as an endorsement. More freedom is being given but also more responsibility. Discuss how this transition must have felt for the early disciples.

WEEK 2: THE REVOLUTION WILL BE SUBTITLED

INTRODUCTION:

The revolution may not be televised (as Gil Scott-Heron's searing song has it) but we do need to put the subtitles on! This week we celebrate Pentecost — a theological, multilingual revolution that shocked and comforted, confused and inspired and goes on shocking, comforting, confusing and inspiring us!

SEEDS TO SOW:

How could you use another language to praise God this week? Perhaps you could learn a simple prayer in another language (ideally one you don't already speak) or could read a translation of the Lord's prayer in a different language?

READ ACTS 2: 1-21

Put the subtitles on!

The authentic voice of the Holy Spirit is multi-vocal, multi-lingual, and multi-cultural! This is *monotheism* (one God) not *monoculture*. Real authentic truth is not tied down by one language, truth is beyond language (indeed it can be expressed in all earthly languages and in the languages of heaven). Into the multilingual explosion of Pentecost Peter rises to the occasion speaking poetry and prophecy into the drama of the moment.

Sometimes in our desire to be authentic, relatable, and relevant we can miss the vivid and heartfelt and fail to capture the imagination of those who hear us. We have perhaps conflated monotheism and monoculture — thinking that there is only one language, style or shape of worship that is 'authentic'. How true is this? Discuss as a group!

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 9: 19-23

All things to all people?

So how authentic *is* Paul? If he keeps being all things to all people?

READ EPHESIANS 4: 1-16

One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism... and countless languages...

Unity is not everyone looking the same and sounding the same. A heap of red thread piled up is not united, it is in fact a tangle waiting to happen. Red, yellow, and blue threads woven together in a bigger pattern — that's unity. Our unity gets its meaning through our difference, not in spite of it.

But it takes work! 'Speaking the truth in love.' Now that's five words to live by (although of course in other languages this same sentence could be more or less than five words!) We don't live authentic lives by always sticking to the same script. But rather by pairing love with truth and communicating it. Truth without love is cold and will freeze us. Love without truth is scalding and will burn us. Love and truth unshared will wither and wilt.

Discuss 'Speaking the truth in love' as an approach to life. What would a life guided by those five words look like?

WEEK 3: WHAT IS INTEGRITY ANYWAY?

INTRODUCTION:

Often tied up with our feelings about authenticity is how we understand integrity. Sometimes we use *authenticity* as a shortcut to integrity. Living with integrity is consistently doing the right thing, the selfless thing, the fair thing, the just thing, the merciful thing. Which is hard work! It's easier to pose at authenticity: "I'm just an everyday guy", "I'm just like one of you", "I just say it like I see it", "I call a spade a spade", "I'm just saying what everyone else is thinking." But authenticity and integrity are not the same thing. You can, after all, be an authentic jerk! All people of integrity are authentic — true to themselves and their principles — but not all authentic people (or people who pose as genuine, unvarnished, authentic people) have integrity. The difference is wisdom.

SEEDS TO SOW:

What does someone of integrity sound like in conversation?

READ ROMANS 5: 1-5

Character produces hope.

The authentic hope that Paul writes about here does not come from our success and achievements. It doesn't come from pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps, overcoming the odds, climbing to the top with grit and determination... it comes from the Holy Spirit! It comes from the fact that as we cling on to God through it all, we discover God is clinging on to us too. It is through God that we persevere, endure and develop character.

Most of the things the world puts its hope in start to fall apart when the going gets tough. It's easy to take hope in friends, family, a job,

a community, when things are going smoothly, but when those things start to fracture, break, or disappear, our hopes can crumble.

Why is hope in Christ different? Why does it often get stronger when other things are falling apart rather than weaker?

READ JAMES 1: 22-27

Forgetting our own reflection.

It is striking that James uses a visual metaphor of a mirror to teach us about listening to God. In the same way that looking in the mirror gives us the chance to see ourselves — listening to God's word is also an opportunity for self reflection 'to see ourselves in the mirror' as it were, to see who God reflects back to us. When we listen to God's word of love we are reminded that we are beloved children of God — and so is everyone else and that should affect how we treat ourselves and others. But unlike our own reflection, we quickly forget that image — it can go in one ear and out the other. Discuss as a group what you make of James's mirror metaphor, what intrigues you, inspires you, or challenges you about it?

READ PHILIPPIANS 2: 14-18

Ready to shine like stars?

Stars shine all the brighter in the darkness of night! In a time when the news cycle is full of inauthenticity and dubious claims we can shine in our authenticity as God's children. But alas, our brightness can get dulled by acrimony and infighting. Arguments over who is the most authentic between churches often come across as pettiness rather than integrity to the wider world. Discuss what we can do to shine together as a church across congregations and denominations.

WEEK 4: ALWAYS MORE QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTION:

Part of being an authentic Christian is wrestling with doubt and ongoing questions. In the same way physical pain is giving the body important information — doubt informs our faith and it can help develop it. The Bible is not a straightforward manual for life, and Christianity does not offer a 10 stage programme to enlightenment. What it is is a relationship. And like any relationship, we go on asking questions and discovering more about each other.

SEEDS TO SOW:

How would you describe 'faith' to someone who had never heard the word before?

READ 1 KINGS 19: 1-15A

Where do we hear God?

It is human nature to look for God in the chaos, in the earthquake, in the fire... but it is also human nature to find God in the silence. To enter that place where we ask God questions and God asks questions of us.

What words leap out to you in this reading?

And how long do you think the silence was from verse 12 to 13?

READ PSALM 43

Questioning God, questioning ourselves.

This psalmist begins questioning God and ends questioning themselves. This can often be our experience of coming to God, through prayer or when reading the Bible. We bring all these expectations and sometimes when we don't get the answers we are looking for we

either rail against the God and the Bible or rail against ourselves.

What's fascinating is that this very dynamic is played out WITHIN the Bible itself. This is a clue that we are to have a rich ongoing relationship of discovery with the Bible. Even the Bible is trying to figure out the Bible! Why would we expect to have a straightforward cookie-cutter experience of the Bible when nobody in the Bible has a mundane cookie-cutter experience of their faith!

We don't have to give ourselves such a hard time when we find parts of the Bible frustrating, alienating or confusing and it's okay not to find quick answers to our questions. The Bible is meant to take time, we are meant to build a relationship with it.

What do you reckon? Agree? Disagree?

Discuss!

READ ROMANS 12: 9-21

Is our love genuine?

While this sounds fantastic it also sounds like a tall order! We will have to support one another to practice this genuine love.

Do you reckon Christians have a reputation for rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep? Or are we more often seen as out of touch or judgemental?

Discuss!

WEEK 5: A GENUINE PERSON

INTRODUCTION:

The approval, esteem, recognition, and personhood, we strive for is something we can already find in Christ. How does it change our lives when we begin with the principle that there is already a place where we belong, where we are understood, where we are loved, where we matter? How does it inform how we think about freedom, redemption, God's call, and living a meaningful life?

SEEDS TO SOW:

A large part of this theme has been about appreciating our own genuineness, our authenticity as creations of God. But what about appreciating the genuineness of others? Even when we know people are putting up a front, projecting something they aren't, how can we prayerfully remember the genuine person underneath? Worthy of love as one of God's children.

READ PHILIPPIANS 4: 8-9

Let the genuine resonate with the genuine!

In a news cycle full of the inauthentic and dubious, the insincere and the fraudulent, let's not look away but instead look *past* allowing the inauthentic to diminish and shrink in the context of the just, the pure, the loving, the commendable and the excellent!

As a group come up with a list of recent examples of just, pure, loving, commendable and excellent things!

READ 1 KINGS 19: 19-21

Letting go, blessing others, setting off.

Here we see a threefold experience of being called by God to something new:

1. Letting go of what we have and where we have been.
2. Taking the opportunity to bless others where we have been.
3. Setting off into the new experience.

Do people sometimes skip stage 2, overeager to launch into the new thing? What are some examples of ways that people can bless others when they are leaving one place/project/community and heading into a new one?

READ LUKE 9: 51-62

Let the dead bury their dead.

The Bible is full of richness and layers — we have just been considering the importance of taking the time to leave well and now here Jesus is telling us to just get on with it already!

So what's going on... As we saw in the Elisha reading it can be important when called to something new by God to take time to bless others before setting off. But Jesus, probably with an eyebrow raised to that very passage (which likely would have been familiar to those questioning him), spurs on these would-be-followers to just get on with it, to seize the moment.

As Christian communities are there times when we are a long time burying things, a long time letting go, and Jesus is inviting us to just leave it behind and come to him...

Discuss these ideas as a group: the tension between the two passages we have just read and how perhaps for our churches there are things we just need to leave behind so that we can keep following Christ today.